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Methodological Issues of Teaching the Heroic Self-Defense Battles of 1915

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Abstract

1915 consisted of tragic days for the Armenian people, when Western Armenians were being violently deported, forced to migrate and massacred. This planned and premeditated policy of genocide by the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire was countered by the Armenian people in a number of locations. Our aim is to use historic information about the 1915 heroic self-defense battles, backed by evidence from research, as a means to develop the national self-consciousness of high school students and form part of their patriotic upbringing. The article outlines the technological approaches and methods, ways and means that allow the most modern didactic requirements to be met and to address the scientific, moral and didactic issues that arise given the underlying theme—Armenian-Turkish relations—as well as the age, mindset and individual characteristics of the learners.

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1. Main text

1915 consisted of tragic days for the Armenian people, when Western Armenians were being violently deported, forced to migrate and massacred.

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This planned and premeditated policy of genocide by the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire was countered by the Armenian people in a number of locations. Through their ancient spirit of resistance and the will to choose certain death as opposed to submission, these heroic self-defense battles were waged against the dishonorable enemy from the lands of Taron to Shapin-Garahisar, from Van to Musa Dag. As improvised as these battles were, they nevertheless ended up as new pages in the Armenian epic.

“We find it difficult to call these military campaigns, because these were not battles for survival – indeed, there was almost no hope for a victory anywhere. It was simply a choice between an honorable death and a torturous extermination on the path of deportation. So we can call them heroic self-defense battles or epic self-defense battles, especially considering the incomparable imbalance between the combating forces (Karapetyan, 2003).”

Our aim is to use the historic information established by research about the self-defense battles of 1915 as a means to facilitate the formation of national self-consciousness and a sense of patriotism among high school children.

Since the beginning of the establishment of Ottoman Turkish rule in Western Armenia, a policy was implemented of plundering Armenians, violating their national, human and religious rights as well as resorting to small massacres, which grew to a larger scale during wars.

In the history of the Ottoman Empire, the chronically repeating and long-standing policy of massacring Armenians rose to an official level at the end of the 19th century. The objective had become to eliminate the Armenian people in a premeditated fashion and rid them of their homeland.

In 1876, the red monster, Abdul Hamid II, ascended the throne. Just two years later, his ally and the head of his government, Kamil Pasha, put forward a document to the authorities, proposing a program with the following wording:

- “if we have managed to nurture a snake in our bosom on our European side, in the form of the Balkan people, we must not make the same foolish mistake in Asian Turkey with the Armenians.”
- “if we remove all the elements that can ever become a reason or tool for foreign intervention, and this nation is eliminated, then Christian Europe can look for an ally in Turkish Armenia and not find one, leaving us in peace (Devrikyan, 2005).”

From 1894 to 1896, at least 300,000 Armenians fell victim to the Hamidian massacres with 2,600 villages and towns destroyed, 100,000 Armenians living in 559 locations forcibly converted to Islam and 323 Armenian churches converted to mosques. Around 500,000 Armenian women, children and elderly lost their breadwinners.

During the Hamidian massacres, the Armenians drew blood as well as spilled their own, and thus did not allow themselves to be completely annihilated (Khushudyan, 1995).

The issue of the self-defense of the Armenians found its way to the agenda when:

- the Ottoman State declared its ideology of assimilating the nations that it conquered and hosted, in order to mechanically increase the number of Turks and Muslims on the territory of its Empire,
- the ideology of pan-Islamism was developed, which involved the forced islamization of resident non-Muslims, specifically the Armenians.

The actions of the Ottoman Empire were unreservedly defended by Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary, while England and France maintained a neutral position. Russia was isolated and could not do anything, except to go for direct and unilateral negotiations with Turkey.

The noose of death was tightening around the Armenians' necks. But it also led to a strengthening in their determination to organize a self-defense campaign and resist the brutal enemy. This became clear when the Turkish

authorities saw that they could not stop the resistance of the Armenians, which had taken the form of self-defense battles, without the intervention of the country's armed forces (Karapetyan, 2003; Studeniki, 2006).

The Armenian people stood before a historic need for self-defense. After being driven out of Europe, the Turks had set themselves the task of creating a new Turkish homeland, which also included Armenia. This political agenda solidified further and was implemented during the First World War.

The Turks gained more and more vital territory to build their new homeland, at the cost of the Armenians' blood.

The Armenians already felt the reality of the Genocide and moved from understanding the need for self-defense to actual battles, because the Genocide was already in progress.

In all the provinces, *vilayets* and cities, the Armenians did not simply stand before the Turkish *yataghan*, they fought heroic self-defense battles from Taron to Van, Musa Dag to Urfa and Shapin-Garahisar. As a result of these battles of resistance, tens of thousands of Armenians were saved. The self-defense of Van ended in a brilliant victory, where a temporary Armenian local government was created, a harbinger of Armenia's future independence.

1914 and 1915 are years of complicated and tangled events in Armenian history, which were condemned to near oblivion by historiography for a long time. They contain many issues which have not been publicized or have been described badly, with contradictory and controversial interpretations (Arzumanyan, 1969; Karapetyan, 2003).

But irrespective of the nature of those interpretations, the reality is that no enemy was able to complete the enslavement of the Armenian people. The smallest numbers were enough to resist the enemy's powerful military pressure and keep their villages, cities and fortresses free of violations. The heroic battles of 1915 testify to this truth.

All of this leads to the following conclusion – the issues of studying the Armenian Genocide of 1915 conducted by the Ottoman Empire and the heroic self-defense battles by the Armenian people as well as teaching them in high school are of particular importance at this time. And this should be organized through the use of teaching and learning technologies which would allow one to deliver material in history through comparisons and the discovery of cause-and-effect mechanisms. Additionally, the primary purpose should be the profound and complete understanding of these historic events by students and a patriotic spirit in their upbringing.

Our aim is to use historic information about the 1915 heroic self-defense battles, backed by evidence from research, as a means to develop the national self-consciousness of high school students and form part of their patriotic upbringing.

The topic “The Self-Defense Battles of Western Armenia in 1915” is both important from an educational point of view and large in volume. For this reason, we consider the usage of school lectures as the most suitable delivery method, because they allow the maximum knowledge to be transferred to the learners, and since “the means of clarification is the most easily perceived by learners and it can be applied in all classes,” they will be given the following assignments in that period –

1. What was the intention of the Young Turks, interpret it. Were they successful in achieving it? Explain.
2. Give a broad description of the topic “The Self-Defense Battles of 1915.”
3. What were the qualitative characteristics of the Armenian people that allowed some of them to be saved?
4. Why were the Turks successful in ending the resistance by Armenian self-defense forces in short periods of time? What were the results of the self-defense battles?

After ending the classes, the teacher moves on to evaluating the extent to which the material has been learned.

The teacher's lectures, which are delivered at a quick pace, allow learners to receive a large volume of material because it is selected in a targeted manner (Slastenin & Shiryayev 2008).

When new material is communicated, the issues we have prioritized are successfully emphasized (and this is verified at the end of each class). Each assignment is important for the formation of the national self-consciousness of the learners as well as their ideological and moral upbringing.

The content of the class as well as the creation of problem situations develop a sense of emotion in the learners and force them to think.

The lesson will become more effective when the class content includes the three following activities.

1. A visit is organized to the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute.
2. An assignment is given to each student after they have seen the exhibits at the museum.
3. Each learner undertakes some practical work (research into one of the topics).

Because the topic of "The Self-Defense Battles of Western Armenia in 1915" is large in volume, we have chosen the combined application of problem-based and modular learning, as a means to raise the effectiveness of the learning process.

The technology of problem-based learning is considered one of the most modern and effective approaches and has a lot of significance for education, especially during the teaching of Armenian history as a subject, when the teacher uses problems to allow learners to work out, think and clarify the idea, as well as justify the historic events. The essence of this technology lies in the fact that the learner works with the module to discover the objectives by himself or herself.

The modular structure of the classes on "The Self-Defense Battles of Western Armenia in 1915" include a full plan of learners' activities during the lesson on the Armenian Genocide and complete information about the topic, as well as the methodical algorithm for objectives and classroom management by the teacher. We propose that history teachers develop a modular program and divide the topic into separate parts – introductory, practical and combined. We consider the learner independence to be the essential feature here. As an active subject in the learning process, the student must learn to plan, organize, undertake and evaluate his or her work.

The combined application of these technologies allows high school students to work independently and also as a team, to express their own opinions as well as hear and assess their friends' reactions to historic events.

At the same time, it helps the high school students develop their worldview as well as the ability and skills to correctly evaluate historic events.

The teaching of this extremely important topic also requires the use of cognitive and investigative methods – generally speaking, the methods of scientific reasoning. They are recognized in pedagogy through their following manifestations and practical functions. We consider the cognitive functions from the point of view of general methodology while examining the specifics of their application in particular conditions at the same time, based on the lesson content and the age, psychological and individual characteristics of the learners. Those methods are as follows:

- **Analysis**, which helps one separate the instructed material into its component elements and to make generalizations through logical abstraction. The essence of this is that separate pieces of data about specific historical facts and phenomena form a complete picture and also help the learner discover the methods for studying the underlying characteristic properties about the subject—history—and the event—the self-

defense battles. Through this process, a basis is discovered for the encouragement of the singular integrity of the topic “The Self-Defense Battles in 1915.”

- **Synthesis**, which allows the mental or real combination of the various sides of the subject—history—and the event—the self-defense battles of 1915 into a single whole.
- **Abstraction**, which is a higher level of thinking and helps the student mentally distinguish and study some of the commonalities and specific features of the subject—the history of the Armenian people—or the event—the self-defense battles of 1915.
- **Generalization**, which is a method of scientific cognition and allows students to move from the singular, or a specific case, to the general through the process of identifying the logical borders that enclose the general characteristics and features of the subject, in this case the history of the Armenian people.
- **Induction** is a method for reaching conclusions and uses separate facts, generalizations, principles, experiments—and, in our case, study results—to reach general evidence-based conclusions.
- **Deduction**, which is also a method for reaching conclusions and helps one go from general facts to specific ones and to gain data on these specific cases—in our case, the Armenian heroic self-defense battles of 1915—as well as to learn them and accept their impact on upbringing.
- **The method of discussion (questions and answers)**, which is a method of empirical research and helps the history teacher lead the class on the topic of “The Self-Defense Battles of 1915” using specific principles.

In order to use the discussion method effectively, we have to prepare for it in earnest. The topic must be strictly delineated, along with its objective, while the fundamental as well as additional questions that may arise must be identified. We consider and plan the organization of the lesson and arrange it in the order in which the questions will arise. We provide generalizations and conclusions on the fundamental questions, which is why these questions must have a certain logical connection and systematization.

- The debate method is distinct in that in our case it is limited to a single topic that is of great historic significance – “The Heroic Self-Defense Battles of 1915.” The objectives of this method are –
 - a) To encourage the cognitive curiosity of the learners.
 - b) To gain new and more profound knowledge of history as well as to strengthen one’s own opinion and to develop the skills to defend that point of view.
 - c) To strengthen the available information and to perceive the subject and topic under study in a more creative light, allowing the formation of value-based opinions.

The application of numerous other traditional and modern methods will allow our topic—“The Heroic Self-Defense Battles of 1915—to be taught and also to form a basis rich in evidence for the history of the Armenian Genocide.

After this, the teacher chooses the approach, method and technology for delivering the topic to the class. This includes –

- selecting actions for class management,
- selecting the content of the knowledge to be transferred,
- deciding on the volume for the class material,
- selecting the facts and examples to be used during the class,
- selecting the place and means for using visual material and technical teaching tools,
- selecting the methods for students’ individual and group-based learning and cognitive activities,
- selecting the relevant learning techniques.

The teacher tests the class being prepared by running a “provisory class.” This allows the teacher to –

- separate the primary and secondary sections of the material and give priority to the main issues,
- decide on the algorithm to run the class.

Using these technological approaches and presenting these topics using methods, ways and means that are interactive allows the most modern didactic requirements to be met and to address the scientific, moral and didactic issues that arise given the underlying theme—Armenian-Turkish relations—as well as the age, mindset and individual characteristics of the learners.

All this allows the teacher to emphasize to high school students that the Turkish perpetrators of the Genocide are forever responsible for their repulsive and illegal act. In addition, the teacher will add that the current generation also has an obligation before history and the memory of their compatriots who were rid of their homeland. This is necessary in order to prevent new national tragedies and to rediscover lost national rights as well as for the return of the historic Armenian territories. This can be achieved only through our own efforts, through the strengthening of our independent state, through national unity as well as the correct patriotic upbringing of our growing and developing generation.

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